



Speaking the truth in love

Eph 4:15

15 December 2017

**STATEMENT FROM MOST REV. ANTHONY FISHER OP
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First and foremost, I want to express my respect for the survivors of child sexual abuse by Church personnel, who have lived with the consequences of abuse for a lifetime and will continue to do so.

Many told their stories with great courage, even at great personal cost, revisiting traumatic experiences. I say again how sorry I am that you were hurt in this way by people you should have been able to trust.

I hope the release of this report provides some comfort to you, your family and friends with the determination that what has been revealed in the pages of this report can never be repeated.

To the Commissioners and staff my thanks for your dedication to listening to the survivors patiently and compassionately, analysing the causes of this terrible scourge, and proposing ways of preventing any recurrence.

The final report comprises 17 volumes, covering nearly five years of hearings. It will take time to digest but it will not sit on any shelf. I will study the findings and recommendations carefully, and then provide a detailed response as we discern, with the rest of the community, the best way forward.

Many of the findings and recommendations will come as no surprise, as they have been touched upon during the life of the Royal Commission; others will require further examination. But what I can say is that I'm appalled by the sinful and criminal activity of some clergy, religious and lay church-workers, that I'm ashamed of the failure to respond by some church leaders, and that I stand ready to address any systemic issues behind this.

I recognise and understand how this has damaged the credibility of the Church in the broader community, and shocked many of our own faithful. If we are to be worthy of people's trust we must demonstrate that the rights of children to be safe, heard and responded to appropriately are always respected.

The final report of the Royal Commission will have much to say to us and we will have much to learn. But I want to assure you we have begun the work.

For at least the past two decades, the Church in Australia has been trying to respond to these concerns. We've come a long way from where we were when most of these terrible crimes occurred in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. But there is always more to be done to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the young and vulnerable.

We are far more focused on the selection, preparation and professional development of Church personnel; on boundaries, warning signs, appropriate interventions and complaint handling. Laypeople, especially women, are now involved on many levels in shaping and running these activities.

Nationally, the Church has established Catholic Professional Standards Ltd with the expertise and independence to develop credible new standards in safeguarding children and vulnerable people, and audit compliance.

Locally, I've established an Office for Safeguarding and Ministerial Integrity to focus on preventative strategies and Sydney Catholic Schools have been similarly proactive. We also now have parish safeguarding officers and other initiatives.

I can assure you I will not rest there and I commit myself and the Catholic Church in Sydney to do our best for survivors of abuse to ensure this terrible chapter is never repeated.

We will, I pray, be a humbler, purer, more compassionate Church as a result of the Commission's work and the scrutiny we have received.

I continue to pray for justice and healing of survivors; for wisdom and compassion for leaders and carers; for repentance by perpetrators; for grace for those tempted to lose faith or hope; for safety for all young people; and for consolation for all those affected. I ask all people of faith to join me in that prayer.



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